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AUTHOR Weinstein, Stuart H.
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ABSTRACT

Children are able to cope with a majority of problems of learning and growing; some problems, however, may require guidance and support. A technique available to all people, trained or untrained in counseling or guidance is bibliotherapy--a process of dynamic interaction between the personality of the reader and literature which may be used for personality assessment, adjustment, and growth. Many outstanding works written beginning in the 1950's have made it possible for the teacher, parent, health professional, and other individuals to help children cope via the use of media forms. Parents and teachers may also use many modern materials dealing with delicate or controversial subjects. When deciding on appropriate materials, one must consider the child's social maturity level, reading ability, and needs. Literature selection tools--i.e., bibliographies, book catalogs, and nonprint media catalogs--are described, and 33 references and addresses for nonprint media procedures and distributers are included. (Author/KP)

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BIBLIOTHERAPY FOR CHILDREN

Using Books and Other Media to Help Children Cope

Stuart H. Weinstein

Instructional Media Coordinator

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BIBLIOTHERAPY FOR CHILDREN:

Using Books and Other Media to Help Children Cope

Stuart H. Weinstein

"Children have more need of models than of critics."

- Joseph Joubert: Pensées

With the increasing knowledge of early child development we realize that children are "people" and all people face problems. Most children are able to cope with a majority of problems of learning and growing, some problems, however, may require guidance and support. It is the latter that must be dealt with through an appropriate intervention.

> In order to master the psychological problems of growing-up overcoming narcissistic disappointments, oedipal dilemmas, sibling rivalries; becoming able to relinquish childhood dependencies; gaining a feeling or selfhood and or self-worth, and a sense of moral obligation - a child needs to understand what is going on within his conscious self so that he can also cope with that which goes on in his unconscious. He can achieve this understanding, and with it the ability to cope, not through rational comprehension of the nature and content of his unconscious, but by becoming familiar with it through spinning out daydreams - ruminating, rearranging and fantasizing about suitable story elements in response to unconscious pressures. By doing this the

child fits unconscious content into conscious fantasies, which then enable him to deal with that content.

(Bettleheim, 1976, p. 6)

A technique that is available to all people, trained or untrained in the fields of counseling and guidance, is bibliotherapy or "media guidance."

Bibliotherapy may be defined as a process of dynamic intereaction between the personality of the reader and literature - interaction which may be utilized for personality assessment, adjustment and growth.

(Russell and Shrodes, 1950, p.335)

Coping mechanisms, for adjustment and growth, have been identified in books, filmstrips, motion pictures, records, tapes, and other forms of print and non-print media.

Although this process may be unfamiliar to many it is not new, in fact, it dates back to early Rome and Greece. For example, the inscription above the door to the library of Thebes translates as "The Healing Place of the Soul". Bibliotherapy is also not a "therapy" in the strict sense of the word, i.e., always requiring a medical or psychological treatment specialist. "It is an activity that lies within the province of every teacher (and others) working with children who are not seriously maladjusted or in need of clinical treatment." (Cianciolo, 1965, p. 898)

Much of the current interest and research in this field began in the late 1930's with many articles appearing in professional journals in the 1940's and 1950's. One of the most significant works appeared in 1950. Typing together dynamic psychology, psychoanalytic techniques, perception,

and the many criteria for literature selection is Bibliotherapy: A Theoretical and Clinical-Experimental Study (doctoral study) by Caroline Shrodes at the University of California. In 1968 Joseph Zaccaria and Harold Moses of the University of Illinois updated and further synthesized the available information in Facilitating Human Development Through Reading: The Use of Bibliotherapy in Teaching and Counseling. The annotated-coded biliographies and cross-indexing provide a flexible supplement to the specialized studies previously conducted. Recently, Eleanor Francis Brown's Bibliotherapy and Its Widening Applications (1975) added a new dimension to this expanding field with extensive bibliographies, indexes, and application techniques.

These outstanding works have made it possible for the teacher, parent, health professional, and other interested individuals to help children cope via the use of the varied media forms available.

Caroline Shrodes (1950) points out that the therapeutic effect that results from the dynamic interaction between the personality of the reader and the literature can be theorized in terms of identification, catharsis, and insight.

> Identification is the real or imagined affiliation of one's self (or sometimes a parent or a friend) with a character or group in the story read.
>
> .....identification usually involves catharsis. The fact that the reader feels he is the character read about means that he shares the character's motivations and conflicts and experiences the charecter's emotions vicariously...Reading may therefore provide a release of tension through symbolic gratification of

socially unacceptable urges or substitute gratification of socially approved motives.

Finally, when the self-recognition in identification is borne out in reality, the identification represents <u>insight</u> - seeing one's self in the behavior of the character and thereby achieving an awareness of one's own motivations and needs. (Russell and Shrodes, 1950, p. 336)

Clara Kircher (1945) studied the effectiveness of trade (commercially available) books as an intrinsic aid in treating the child with a social or an emotional problem. She described techniques, based on research findings, that one might effectively use to guide a child into selecting a book that had potential in helping bring about personal understanding.

Bettleheim (1976) points out:

For a story to truly hold the child's attention, it must entertain him and arouse his curiosity. But to enrich his life, it must stimulate his imagination, help him to develop his intellect and clarify his emotions; be atuned to his anxieties and aspirations, give full recognition to his difficulties, while at the same time suggesting solutions to the problems which perturb him. In short, it must at one and the same time relate to all aspects of his personality - and this without ever belittling but, on the contrary, giving full credence to the seriousness of the child's predicaments, while simultaneously promoting confidence in himself and in his future. (p. 5)

Much of the literature deals with the application of books and non-print media (slide/tapes, motion pictures, sound recordings, filmstrips,

etc.) to the remediation of serious deficits and problems. Parents, teachers, and others may also use many of the "modern" materials which deal with delicate subjects (death, divorse, sex, physical and mental deviance) and controversial subjects (drugs, extramarital and premarital sex, delinquency, life-styles) to assist them in areas they are not "original" or brave enough to handle. In most cases the child may suffer from the inability of the adult to cope with the particular "touchy" area.

> ....the prevalent parental belief is that a child must be diverted from what troubles him most: his formless, nameless anxieties, and his chaotic, angry, and even violent fantasies. (Bettleheim, 1976, p. 7)

Sheltering the child from the real world is a foible of many parents who feel, that at a "magic age" the child, will automatically switch from innocence to maturity.

There is no standard approach to selecting, presenting, and analyzing the use of books and other materials to help children cope. When deciding on what would be appropriate material one must be aware of the child's social maturity level, reading ability (for very young children or non-readers the book must be read to them or an audio-visual material selected) and needs.

The selection of an appropriate "story" doesn't necessarily require prior formal testing or evaluation of the child, however, familiarity with the literature selection tools i.e., bibliographies, book catalogs, and non-print media catalogs is essential in making the best use of available products.

Evelyn Altemus (1973) in "Books for the Young Disabled Reader" stresses

that the physical appearance of the book is important. "It must be of comfortable size and shape, attractive in color with many meaningful illustrations and a large clear typeface with ample space between the lines. In addition, the story should be fairly direct; short with frequent breaks." (pp. 3161-3162) As a follow-up activity, Francis Weisenberg (1973) suggests an informal reading conference in which the student retells the story, explores how the characters may have felt, relates similar personal incidents, and discusses the consequences of attitudes and behavior.

Many of the bibliographies, currently available, are compiled according to reading level and are arranged in behavioral-problem categories. Behavior Patterns in Children's Books (Kircher, 1966) annotates 507 books within twenty-four categories and cross-indexes them under 146 behavior patterns. The list is arranged by large subject categories rather than by grade range and the subject groupings are followed by a section of "Selected Readings," a "Behavior Index," author and title indexes, and a "Directory of Publishers". Reading Ladders for Human Relations edited by Virginia Reid (1972) lists books that may "increase the social sensitivity of young people and extend their experience, appreciation and understanding of their own life styles and the life styles of others." The books are annotated and grouped according to four themes: "Creating a Positive Self-Image;" "Living with Others;" "Appreciating Different Cultures;" and "Coping with Change." The themes are divided into four "ladders" of difficulty for primary, intermediate, junior, and senior school readers. Complementing the work are eight essays presenting methods for effective use of books in a bibliotherapeutic style.

One bibliography that includes interest level as well as reading level is Good Reading for Poor Readers (Spache, 1972). An annotated compilation of more than 600 books entered under 46 heading, this work classifies adapted, simplified, series, programmed, trade, and textbooks. It also contains a collection of indexes and reading lists, articles on appropriate applications of these materials and a section on readability estimating.

An example of a specialized bibliography applicable to the health field is Books That Help Children Deal with a Hospital Experience (Altshuler, 1974). Following a discussion of the need for materials to help children adjust, 49 books are selected and annotated for this specific purpose.

Literature for Human Understanding (Taba, 1948) is a collection of essays for teachers outlining some of the approaches, advantages, and disadvantages of reading guidance. Much of the evaluative criteria is taken from teaching situations.

"Children Face Themselves Through Books" (Homze, 1964) and "Books for Young Disabled Readers" (Altemus, 1973) are examples of some specialized reading lists appearing in the professional literature.

The American Library Association, the American Hospital Library Association, the Veterans Administration Hospitals as well as many other professional organizations generate lists, booklets, and journal articles dealing with many "life adjustment" areas.

Facilitating Human Development Through Reading: The Use of Bibliotherapy in Teaching and Counseling by Joseph S. Zaccaria and Harold Moses (1968) is a very comprehensive work offering the theoretical and applied aspects of bibliotherapy plus appendices and extensive annotated bibliographies of

books and other types of reading material. The bilbiographies have 24 subdivisions under the category of "General Problems of Life and Adjustment" and 15 subdivisions under the category of "Problems Caused by Disabilitites." The most recent addition to the major literature in this field is Eleanor Francis Brown's Bibliotherapy and Its Widening Applications (1975). It is an excellent selection tool.

Many non-print media products can be used in the field to supplement books as well as provide the non-reader with an alternative mechanism. Perennial Education, Inc. has a wide range of motion pictures available including the areas of "Family Living-Sex Education for Elementary Grades," "Personal Guidance," and "Safety." For example, within the areas of "Personal Guidance" such topics as alcohol, drugs, smoking, V.D., value clarification, and aggression are covered by several motion pictures designed for various age groups. Walt Disney Educational Media Company is also producing programs in the health and V.D. areas. For the older viewer, CRM McGraw-Hill has a film series entitled "Conflict and Awareness: A Film Series on Human Values." Topics in this collection include separation/divorce, suicide, group conformity/rejection, and young marriage.

The Mental Health Media Evaluation Project, Bethesda, Maryland has two "Mental Health Film Resource Listings" which were made available March 1977. An Evaluative Guide to 16mm Mental Health Films is an annotated bibliography of approximately 250 films evaluated by mental health association volunteers and staff, film specialists, mental health professionals and educators and recommended for public mental health education. A Comprehensive Resource Guide to 16mm Mental Health Films is a comprehensive bilbiography of all titles located by the Mental Health Media Evaluation Project's market

search found to be readily available and applicable to public mental health education (approximately 1,500 titles). In both listings the descriptive information on each title includes suggestions for use, appropriate audience level, evaluator's comments, synopsis, types of availability (purchase, rental, free-loan) and source(s). A complete listing of film titles by applicable subject heading outline precede the alphabetical listings.

Shrodes (1950) states that "the new values of bibliotherapy help to extend the use of literature in the clinic or classroom with a group or an individual." Most of the authors agree that bibliotherapy "provides opportunity for catharsis and greater insight into one's own motivation and the behavior of others. They agree that in bibliotherapy some sort of integration of intellectual perception and emotional drive takes place." One common thread running through this preventive technique is beautifully expressed in this closing thought:

> Storybooks about everyday people, their hardships, their sacrifice and persistence when faced by great trials are valuable for guidance. They build a child's faith in himself and others. They foster joy in being alive, a desire to welcome each new day with renewed courage. Many of life's problems, large and small, can be lessened or solved through the pages of an appropriate book.
>
> (Schultheis, 1970, p. 5)

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Non-Print Media Producers and Distributors

1. CRM-McGraw Hill FILMS
   Sales Service Division
   1221 Avenue of the Americas
   New York, New York 10020

   (Separation, Divorce, Suicide
   Group Conformity and Human Values)

2. Guidance Associates
   757 Third Avenue
   New York, New York 10017

   (Coping)

3. Mental Health Media Evaluation Project
   Mental Health Media Center
   Re-Runs Unlimited, Inc.
   4907 Cordell Avenue
   Bethesda, Maryland 20014

   (Evaluation of 16mm Films)

4. Perennial Education, Inc.
   1825 Willow Road
   Northfield, Illinois 60093

   (Sex, Guidance, Mental Health, Safety)

5. Sunburst Communications
   39-A Washington Avenue
   Pleasantville, New York 10570

   (Health, Family Living, Death Education,
   Psychology, Prejudice)

6. Walt Disney Educational Media
   500 South Buena Vista Avenue
   Burbank, California 91503

   (Health and V.D.)